



September 17, 2018

**Via Electronic Filing**

Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary  
Federal Communications Commission  
445 Twelfth Street, S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20554

**CG Docket Nos. 13-24 and 03-123**

**NPRM Comments – Misuse of Internet Protocol Captioned Telephone Service (IP CTS)**

Dear Ms. Dortch:

Florida Telecommunications Relay, Inc. (FTRI) submits these comments in response to the Report and Order, Declaratory Ruling, Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, and Notice of Inquiry released on June 10, 2018. In this document, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) seeks comment on issues related to the FCC's Measures to Ensure the Sustainability of Internet Protocol Captioned Telephone Service (IP CTS). Specifically, the FCC is looking for comments on the need for third-party assessment of eligible users, requirements for IP CTS marketing and outreach methods or practices, IP CTS quality assurance measurements, and program efficiency.

FTRI agrees with the FCC implementing rules which seek to control and measure the rapid growth of IP CTS minutes to safeguard the integrity of the TRS programs. IP CTS provides deaf and hard of hearing individuals an excellent opportunity to participate in telecommunication services using advanced technologies and the FCC should ensure this service is sustainable for future generations.

**State Role in the Administration of IP CTS (C.)**

FTRI has been the administrator of Florida TRS program since 1991. FTRI's dependable infrastructure and network is well-equipped to employ the assessment process desired by the FCC. FTRI agrees with the Commission's findings that not all persons with hearing loss need an IP CTS device when an alternative device, such as an amplified telephone, suitably meets their need. FTRI's process ensures that the client's best interest is met when providing a device and comprehensive service. This is accomplished by assessing each applicant meeting the basic program eligibility criteria (3 years or older, Florida resident, certified as having hearing loss) and testing the applicant on different devices. Should a qualified applicant's test/demonstration on an amplified telephone prove unsuitable, the applicant is introduced to the captioned telephone device. Training is provided on each device. After a period, should an individual find that a specific device is not suitable for their need, they can modify to a different device.

FTRI proposes that the FCC consider conducting a five-year pilot program like that of the NDBEDP to assess best practices prior to implementing permanent rules. This pilot program will also provide state EDPs time needed to adjust to FCC proposed rules and requirements as well as make any necessary statutory changes.

## **Ensuring Independent Assessments (D.)**

Since most state EDPs have assessment or verification processes in place to ensure that CTS or IP CTS equipment is appropriately distributed to qualified end users, FTRI suggests that the FCC certify state EDPs to administer the assessment process to ensure client eligibility.

### *Assessment by State Programs (para. 121, 122, 123)*

Each state EDP has their own eligibility criteria based on specific rules and should not be required to modify their existing eligibility criteria. For instance, Florida does not base eligibility on income as it believes anyone needing access to the telecommunications system should have equal opportunity to obtain access to a suitable device.

As mentioned above, FTRI has been the administrator of Florida TRS program since 1991. FTRI's dependable infrastructure and network is well-equipped to employ the assessment process desired by the FCC. FTRI agrees with the Commission's findings that not all persons with hearing loss need an IP CTS device when an alternative device, such as an amplified telephone, suitably meets their need. FTRI's process ensures that the client's best interest is met when providing a device and comprehensive service. This is accomplished by assessing each applicant meeting the basic program eligibility criteria (3 years or older, Florida resident, certified as having hearing loss) and testing the applicant on different devices. Should a qualified applicant's test/demonstration on an amplified telephone prove unsuitable, the applicant is introduced to the captioned telephone device. Training is provided on each device. After a period, should an individual find that a specific device is not suitable for their need, they can modify to a different device.

In addition, individuals issued IP CTS equipment prior to these rule changes should be referred to state EDP for reassessment when seeking replacement or repair of their existing IP CTS equipment. It is highly probable that these individuals were not informed about state EDPs and therefore it is unlikely that they were made aware of alternative technologies such as amplified telephones. It is suggested that when individuals need repair service on their existing captioned telephone device, they be referred to the state EDP for assessment/test/evaluation on an alternative device (amplified telephone).

Based on its existing dependable infrastructure and network, FTRI believes it is well-equipped to implement the IP CTS assessment process in six (6) months, which is a reasonable amount of time. Resources needed would consist of funding, demo devices, new configurations of database processes and training the trainers on IP CTS procedures to conduct assessment, etc. Should the rules be finalized prior to January 2019 or shortly thereafter, FTRI anticipates being ready to begin assessment by July 1, 2019.

Benefits to using FTRI to conduct assessment are as follows:

1. Ensure individuals requesting IP CTS qualify
2. Ensure individuals requesting IP CTS receive the device that best meets their need such as amplified telephone or another alternative device
3. Ensure individuals requesting IP CTS are fully educated about the IP CTS program, captioning service, and complete functionality of the IP CTS program, including how the program is funded
4. Access to FTRI's proven expertise based on years of services
5. Access to comprehensive reports
6. Proven outreach methods and tracking reports
7. Statewide distribution network through contracts with our regional distribution centers (RDCs)

#### *Assessment by Third-Party Professionals (para. 127)*

FTRI has an existing relationship with the Florida Society Hearing Healthcare Professional (FSHHP) and the Florida Academy of Audiologist (FLAA) and believes assistance could be provided to these organizations, as well as other organizations interested in conducting assessments, could be made available upon request. FTRI employs an Approved Certifier Service Provider outreach program whereby the RDCs schedule visits to provide informational materials, conduct off-site assessment and equipment distribution/training in HAS and Aud. offices, and other assistance as requested. FTRI's marketing strategy during the upcoming fiscal year is to expand on this program. Each Service Provider (SP) is assigned an SP identification number for tracking referrals. Reports can be generated to reveal effectiveness of program. It is FTRI's intentions to request IP CTS outreach/marketing funds to subsidize the Approved Certifier Service Provider program currently in place to fulfill Florida's TASA requirements.

#### **Communications and Messaging on IP CTS (E. 1)**

FCC should consider assuming responsibility of all IP CTS messaging to include branding, outreach and marketing. This could be done by designating a neutral third-party organization with proven methods conducting outreach and marketing to IP CTS' targeted population to ensure consistent branding and messaging of the IP CTS program. Like the iCC program, a nationwide call center with a single toll-free number that serves as the clearinghouse on all things IP CTS, is another way to maintain consistency with messaging and branding. Once again, a pilot program could provide an opportunity to research and develop a cost-efficient and effective outreach and marketing program.

#### *Written Marketing Materials (para. 138)*

A national messaging campaign promoting the IP CTS program directing potential applicants to participating state EDPs would foster consistency with messaging and branding. IP CTS providers would continue to market the IP CTS services as they are currently doing but use a national 800 toll-free number to be managed by a third-party entity. Past messages and advertisements have shown inconsistent and often with misleading messages.

#### *Equipment Installer Notifications (para. 140)*

Should the state EDPs provide the assessment for IP CTS applicants, this process may not be necessary as this would be part of the assessment procedure. Although, it may be good practice to remind new consumers of the nature and costs of IP CTS and this information could be collected in a follow-up QA Survey. (*E.g., Did the installer explain how captions are provided and the cost associated with this service?*)

#### *Incentives to Caregivers and Service Providers for Seniors (para. 141)*

Should the state EDPs provide the assessment for IP CTS applicants, this ruling may not be necessary as state EDPs do not offer incentives. However, for state EDPs that decide not to participate in the IP CTS program, a third-party organization shouldn't be allowed to offer incentives of any kind.

#### **IP CTS Registration Renewal and Phone Reclamation (E. 2)**

Should state EDPs become the entity to conduct assessment, all existing users should be informed by the "clearinghouse" agent about a new point-of-contact regarding exchanging a non-functioning device. During that process state EDPs can demonstrate alternative technologies, such as amplified telephones and process an exchange should the alternative device meet their needs.

## **Performance Goals**

### *Goal #3: Provision of Service in the Most Efficient Manner (para. 155)*

Citing outreach and marketing efficiency as an example, the services should be measurable according to benchmarks established by the Commission. An example could be a cost-per-outreach activity or cost-per-acquisition, which may be achievable using empirical evidence and methods. Funds directed towards achieving goals can have accountable measures to allow efficiency within certain parameters that allow for the applicant to best understand the device and the service provided.

## **Performance Measures (para.157)**

Ideally the Commission should seek out independent third-parties with expertise administering an EDP to conduct develop and implement a quality assurance program disseminating surveys on all IP CTS program services, to include but not limited to, captioning, assessment, education, installation/training and equipment. Engaging existing expertise should be primary for Commission consideration for a pilot program.

## **Program Efficiency (3.)**

A national database should be an FCC goal towards achieving program efficiency.

Questions related to these comments may be directed to James Forstall at [jforstall@ftri.org](mailto:jforstall@ftri.org).

Sincerely,

James Forstall, Executive Director  
Florida Telecommunications Relay, Inc.